

Informant: LMP-S12

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MOJ: Okay. Let's go to contacts first and...

S12: This one.

MOJ: Yeah, and begin with Dora Umberto, Six. What do you know about her, in terms of her knowledge of herbs?

S12: Well, very, very limited.

MOJ: Yeah.

S12: She is serving an area that is very much - she is almost the only botanica in El Monte, where she is. Know what I mean? So that means that she either learned it by people requesting certain things. You know, remembering the interview that I did to Oscar. He said that even though he used certain herbs he learned that people come in and asking for certain herbs and then people telling him what it was good for. So by this time, almost nine years since she opened the botanica, more or less, she's still in business. So I assume that she either learned about it or is associated with someone who knows.

MOJ: Right.

S12: Her knowledge of the religion and her knowledge of herbs have been very limited because she's a very new Santera by Lucumi standards. Plus the fact that she comes from a culture completely out of the loop. She's Argentinean. She came on her, you know, late into the religion. She did not grow up in the religion. More or less like Charlie's case. You know? They came into the religion very late and whatever knowledge they have is and only have been acquiring through contact with other priests and priestesses, and many times that's why we find so much discrepancy in the information like, for example, they may say one thing today and tomorrow will say something else. They will have different spellings for the same thing depending on what the source is and that's why whatever's correct in his translation there's a lot of inconsistencies that just attest to the fact that, in the case of Charlie, that he still acquiring that knowledge and because he's still acquiring it, depending on his sources...

MOJ: Yeah.

S12: ...he's getting, you know, different spellings, different information and that what he spelling out.

MOJ: Yeah.

S12: Okay. So, and that's probably her case. You know. That's probably her case. So in the case of Dora she probably is working with someone. I haven't talked to her in a long

time. But she still in business which, for a botanica, if she wasn't effective the community would have just dropped her a long time ago.

MOJ: Oh right.

S12: So probably she's doing something or she had brought in someone or done something to keep in business because there is not a big community in El Monte. So you have to lay a lot on the regular Mexican traffic that goes around. So it would be a very good idea to check her out.

MOJ: Yeah. Okay. So she's a Santera as well as an Espiritista?

SF: Yeah.

MOJ: Okay. Now hold on a second. I'm going to have to -

S12: (Referring to Tony) He is living now in Bakersfield. He moved from town, and I lost contact with him. I need to track him down. But I know he moved out of town. He's in Bakersfield now.

MOJ: Did he own a botanica?

S12: He did. He used to. He used to own a botanica. He still has supplies that he sells out of his house by phone order. The important thing about Tony, which I think is worth looking at, is that Tony is an African American who is absolutely fluent in Spanish. He is a Santero and he is a Palero and he was initiated as an Osianista a couple of years ago. What makes his case fascinating is the fact that being an African American, he grew up among Puerto Ricans and he learned Spanish with Puerto Ricans and he's fluent. You wouldn't think that his first language is English. He's completely bilingual, so his case is fascinating because he's moving between the both communities. He's moving between the African American community and the Latino community. You know what I mean, so that's a fascinating case, of a person making the transition from the English speaking community into the Spanish and then back and keeping in between both communities and serving both. So his case is a very interesting case. I known Tony for about fifteen or seventeen years now.

MOJ: Uh-huh. Okay. Now what was the name of his botanica when he had one here?

S12: I think it was Obatala but I'm not sure.

MOJ: What?

S12: I think it was Obatala.

MOJ: Obatala.

S12: But I'm not sure. He's a priest of Obatala.

MOJ: Alright. So probably it means it's gonna be listed in the phone directory for Bakersfield.

S12: It may be. I have to check with another priestess that is there that she does have a botanica, a huge purveyor of goods for botanicas in the Bakersfield area, and I need to check with her to see if she knows where he is.

MOJ: Thanks. Let's see. Lois. Nine.

S12: Yeah.

MOJ: Now, who is he...

S12: Lois is a Santero, he's an Osianista, very well known in the community. Very well known in the community. He works out of his house. I can call him and he was very interested in the project when I talked to him some time ago.

MOJ: Alright.

S12: And he's really well known in the community and he's very well established.

MOJ: What's his last name? Remember?

S12: His last name...I have to find out because I don't remember. I know them by names all the time.

MOJ: Life of Lazaro?

S12: Yeah.

MOJ: Does he speak English as well as Spanish?

S12: Yeah, he speaks some English. You know, if you...he speaks some English.

MOJ: Alright. Now if you would get a phone number and address.

S12: Yeah, I can talk to him and explore these things which are in the project and then we can go there.

MOJ: Okay.

S12: Yeah.

MOJ: Alright, if you can do that in the next few days. I still want to take you to Ricardo's place.

S12: Yeah I'm very much interested in seeing what she's got too. Now it's easier now for me because Thursday's I'm off. I finished at [???].

MOJ: Oh, you finished [???] That's the semester system.

S12: Yeah, so I finished with [???]. So that only leaves me Wednesdays, Mondays and Wednesdays with UCLA and Cal State, so that means that my Thursdays are off, so are my Fridays and stuff like that, and I still haven't started my heavy duties as an Oriate when I start traveling. So, you know, Tuesday is okay, Thursdays or Fridays.

MOJ: So we can just go together and sit in this parking lot and...

S12: Yeah.

MOJ: ...put us another sign out there and...

S12: Yeah. Yeah.

MOJ: Number ten. Jorge.

S12: Jorge. Jorge is a good person to visit. He's a Babalao, very well established in the community, and he's an Osianista. He is not one of the senior Babalaos but he is close to that, and I know that he will be very, very much interested in participating in the project.

MOJ: What part of the city does he live in?

S12: He's in Glendale.

MOJ: In Glendale?

S12: Yeah.

MOJ: Where does Lois live, what part of town?

S12: In El Monte.

MOJ: Alright.

S12: And, you know, it would be a good addition to have Jorge on board.

MOJ: Does he speak English?

S12: Yeah.

MOJ: Pretty extensive?

S12: Enough to hold a conversation and I guess that I will say yes. He is the Godfather to Forest Whitaker.

MOJ: Oh, wow.

S12: So, I imagine that we can communicate.

MOJ: Yeah.

S12: You know.

MOJ: I like Forest.

S12: Yeah, I do too. I was trying to get him to come to lecture at my class at UCLA but he's too busy he couldn't make it. But, you know, so he initiated Forest Whitaker as a Babalao so, you know, after Forest had the fall out with Charlie.

MOJ: Oh yeah.

S12: Okay.

MOJ: Okay. Numero eleven. Claudia didn't have much luck with her.

S12: Juanita Alvarez, no. Botanica Cristo Rey is a very old botanica. I know Cristo Rey. I have been in Los Angeles for twenty years and I've known Cristo Rey since then. When I went there it was already old, you know. So I don't know the people at Cristo Rey. I know it's a very important botanica. It's been around for a long time.

MOJ: Yeah.

S12: So I can try to drop by there and check it out and see what's up.

MOJ: Number twelve.

S12: Her name, what is her name? Dorothy knows it. She's from Bakersfield. Her English is really almost non-existent but her children who work with her are bilingual. So I don't know if you want to go as far as extending the research to Bakersfield.

MOJ: If we have time, if we run out of other things to do here.

S12: Well, it's worth looking at her. It's worth looking at her establishment because she is the first - the first time I see a Mexican-American breaking big into the Lucumi community, meaning that she has a huge business that supplies to botanicas as far as Northern San Francisco which use to be the sole territory of Cubans. So by her being right there, you know what I mean. You know usually Saidel was the ones who supplied everyone in the state. Now she's giving Saidel a run for its money. You know, she has San Francisco, Northern San Francisco, Bakersfield. You know, all the way north of the grapevine for Bakersfield on, is her territory, which used to be Saidel's, so it's thee botánica - the place that was above Saidel, El Indio. Now Greta is. She's in there, big time, in the big league so, you know, it's good to know because she knows every botanica, every person in town, she knows everyone.

MOJ: And she knows a lot about herbs?

S12: She does. She is also a Palera and I don't know if she had that extensive practice but she has Godchildren, I know that. But I think that her value, more than the herbal value, is probably, knowing who's who. I work for her [??] of her house and I know that she works and she has an extensive house, a huge house in Bakersfield. So, you know, she's got to know about herbs because, you know, there's no way you can work in a Palo or a Lucumi tradition without knowing about herbs. You have to, you must. There is no way you can do it otherwise.

MOJ: Does she have an actual store?

S12: Yes she does.

MOJ: Do you know what the name of that is?

S12: I think it's Botanica San Rafael. Botanica San Rafael.

MOJ: Maybe Dorothy would know.

S12: No, I think... I can call her. I think, yeah, Botanica San Rafael is the name of the botanica. Her name is what I don't...what is her name? I think I forgot Greta's name. The point of view, you get so used to talk to people by the first or nickname they use. It's like many people are so used to call me Sammy, that if you go to the Lucumi community and you say Ysamur Flores, no one will know me. No one will know me. There is only some elders in the community who still call me by my first name and they will know. But most of the people, if you said you know, Ysamur Flores asked me to come, they would say who's he?

MOJ: Alright. Who is number thirteen? Mike, his son and Mike, in Hacienda Heights?

S12: Oh, yes. Mike is a Babalao. His son is a Babalao. His wife is a priestess. Huge house, very important house in Hacienda Heights. They are both Osianistas, the father and the son. Very much involved. Especially the son is a fascinating case because his son is probably about twenty-four years old, and the son is just gung ho about the whole thing. He's very knowledgeable. He still has the cockiness of youth, you know what I mean? He's trying to really make you think that he can walk on water and stuff like that. But once you pass that garbage, he's a very likable guy, and he's very thoughtful and stuff like that. But you know, once he knows that he can't dazzle you and make you worship him, he just comes down, levels out, and he's very easy to deal with. I took one of my classes to his house and he's cool. He's fully bilingual, no problem.

MOJ: Mike or his son?

S12: Mike speaks English. His son, his first language is English. So you know.

MOJ: Do you know the last name, Mike's last name?

S12: Mike, Mike, Mike. Hold on. What is that woman's name? - Irma. I have the phone number here. The last name is Irma.

MOJ: How do you spell that?

S12: I-R-M-A. Irma.

MOJ: Oh. Okay.

S12: But I can call him.

MOJ: And Greta...do you have a last name there?

S12: No, I don't. If anybody gets a hold of this book, they will not be able to get nowhere because only first names are in there.

MOJ: Enrique, number fourteen.

S12: Enrique. Enrique, Enrique, Enrique, Enrique, Lopez! Phone number: 323-582-9337.

MOJ: And where does he live?

S12: He lives in Compton.

MOJ: Now, his specialty is providing the animals, but does he know herbs?

S12: Yeah he does. He knows about remedies and stuff like that. He's very good at that. He's been studying with me also.

MOJ: Number eighteen was Ricardo and that's the one we want to camp out in his parking lot.

S12: Yeah.

MOJ: Nineteen, Miriam.

S12: Miriam, she's in HuntingtonPark.

MOJ: Yeah.

S12: She is very good with herbs too.

MOJ: She does know herbs?

S12: Uh-huh.

MOJ: And twenty, Pilar.

S12: Pilar. Pilar, I spoke to her and I've been trying to set an appointment to interview her but she travels a lot to Cuba, so it's really - and she's just next door to Ricardo in the corner.

MOJ: Okay.

S12: You know what I mean. It's like, she's on Atlantic and then you have to go across the, you know, when you take the corner to Ricardo's, that's the same block. She is willing to participate. There's a Babalao also doing work there. I don't know him. So you have those right there.

MOJ: Okay, and twenty-one, Miguel. I don't know have you told this guy or did Claudia find him?

S12: Oh yes, yes, yes Miguel. He's in Echo Park.

MOJ: Oh, okay. So you're the one. You're the one.

S12: Yeah, he's a sobador and he is very much, even though he's a Santero, he is more geared towards the Mexican Curanderismo tradition.

MOJ: Now, do you have an address for him, a last name, a telephone number?

S12: I don't have his last name, but I know that Enrique may have his phone number. I have to talk to Enrique.

MOJ: And twenty-two, Armando.

S12: Armando. He's still there. I think that Gloria has talked to him hasn't she?

MOJ: She tried. I don't think- no she hasn't interviewed him. I think maybe she met him one day and hasn't had an interview. Does he speak English as well as Spanish?

S12: Yeah, he speaks English.

MOJ: And back to...let's see, back to Miguel. Does he speak English?

S12: Miguel, Miguel, Miguel- where are you at?

MOJ: Go back to twenty-one and twenty.

S12: Pilar, her English is problematic.

MOJ: Okay.

S12: And Miguel, I don't have the foggiest idea. I don't know. He, well no, because the student who interviewed him is a Spanish speaker so she interviewed him in Spanish.

MOJ: Miguel?

S12: Miguel, yes.

MOJ: Okay, and Maria Jose, who I've seen at many of these events...

S12: Oh, she's all over the place.

MOJ: Does she herself no anything about herbs?

S12: I don't know. I really don't know. I know that she knows everyone. She's into everyone's business and houses and stuff like that.

MOJ: So she could just tell us a lot of stuff.

S12: But, you know, well you know, she may be able to tell you whose who, but I don't know about her knowledge of the religious tradition. I really don't know well enough.

MOJ: Do you know where she comes from?

S12: I think she's Nicaraguan. She's from Nicaragua and she came again as an adult to the religion.

MOJ: A convert?

S12: Yeah, yeah. I don't think that she was, you know, she started to get around. She was working. She has her own job. I think that she still keeps it. Because the nature of Lucumi tradition, you know, it depends what house you belong to, that will be the emphasis. If your house is more geared towards performance, you'll know a lot about that. If your house is geared more towards healing, you will know about that. I think it depends on the elders, that govern the house - even though she comes from, her Godfather, Jose, who is quite good with herbs. He lives in Huntington Park as well. She broke with him very early on, and she moved somewhere else.

MOJ: When you say her Godfather Jose...

S12: Jose Navarro.

MOJ: What's the last...how do you spell that?

S12: Navarro. N-A-V-A-R-R-O. Navarro. Let me see, Jose, Jose, Jose, he's 323-583-2116.

MOJ: And she broke with him. Does that mean they're not on good terms anymore?

S12: They're not on good terms at all.

MOJ: Okay.

S12: So...

MOJ: Be careful.

S12: Yes. Yeah.

MOJ: But he knows herbs?

S12: He does. He does. He's not an Osianista but he is usually a person that people may call when they need certain herbs and he will go and collect them.

MOJ: Oh...

S12: So, you know. He has a garden with some of the herbs, and stuff like that, so you know, a really good person to know.

MOJ: Yeah, yep, especially I would like to get more samples from people's gardens. That's the only way that we have to identify them for certain, as to the species. Alberto Lerna, number twenty-four. We found him, someone Claudia found.

S12: [reading down the list] I don't know these people. Oh, thirty-five, seems like she's Mayan.

MOJ: Oh. Now that's somebody that Claudia...

S12: That last name is Mayan.

MOJ: Well, have to let Claudia look into that. [Sounds like: Kenyobal] as a language, is that common?

S12: Huh?

MOJ: For language, it says [sounds like: kenyobal]?

S12: I don't know. Yeah. It's probably...I don't know. That sounds like Mayan.

MOJ: Okay.

SF: Which would make a lot of sense because in the MacArthur area there are a lot of Central Americans there.

MOJ: And all the rest of these we referred to Claudia, one way or another, I don't know anything about them. And the last one, forty-three, that's somebody that Charlie referred Cosentino to your A-list.

S12: He was?

MOJ: American white who became a Santero. That's all I know about it.

S12: No.

MOJ: Alright. The next set are botanicas and I copied their cards, what's written on their cards, as to what they are and I wanted to have you translate each of these phrases for me rather than trust modern dictionary.

S12: Ok.

MOJ: The first one is “Buenas Suerta.”

S12: Good luck, yeah, and this is?

MOJ: First line.

S12: The first line to the first comma it says: “Contamos con todo tipo de regalos,” which means: we have all kind of gifts, accessories, and perfumes for men and women.

MOJ: Men and women.

S12: Then the next sentence goes: “Everything for good luck, for people, vehicle, houses, and businesses.

MOJ: Oh, that’s **ne-go-ci - os**.

S12: “**Negocios**,” are businesses.

MOJ: Business.

S12: “It solves problems”...these are vernacular, very bad Spanish. It solves problems, what it means is problems from your thought. Like, you know, if you’re preoccupied and worried.

MOJ: Oh, that’s the “**pensamiento**?”

S12: Yeah, yeah. “Sorrows of the soul.”

MOJ: What?

S12: “Penas de alma.

MOJ: What was that?

S12: Sorrows of the soul.

MOJ: Poetic.

S12: Very poetic and very vernacular poetic. You know because, but you know what I mean, it’s very...but this is very much...the reason why I know this, is because I have many people from Central America and that’s the way they come with questions-because this is not your standard Spanish at all. But, for example, I have many of my Central American clients, will come to ask about someone, and will say, “I want to know the thoughts of.” What they are meaning is, I would like to know what are the intentions of.

MOJ: Oh.

S12: See what I mean, so after many years, now I know what it means, but at the beginning it was like, its just that street Spanish in Central America is so different from the one I learned in the Caribbean. I have to do another study just to consult people.

MOJ: Uhum.

S12: “Diseases of unknown origin, heart sufferings.” That means when you’re in love and no one corresponds you.

MOJ: Unrequited love.

S12: Phone cards and booths where they can make long distance phone calls.

MOJ: What now, “**tar-jetas**?”

S12: **Tarjetas y casetas telefonicas.**

MOJ: What is **tarjetas**?

S12: They are phone cards.

MOJ: Phone cards, oh.

S12: So it’s phone and calling booth. You know, phone calling booth. I mean you can buy your card there, and you can call from there as well.

MOJ: Okay.

S12: “**Piedras**,” which means stones and “quartz crystal” means that she has semi-precious stones. So, you know, quartz is the most known.

MOJ: Yeah.

S12: So it means all the semi-precious crystals and stuff. So she’s into everything. Then on the starburst it says: “A light in your path and a star to guide you.”

MOJ: “**Una luz...**”

S12: **...en tu camino.**

MOJ: So that’s?

S12: A light in your path.

MOJ: A light in your path.

S12: And a star to guide you. Very poetic this lady. I wonder.

MOJ: A light in your path.

S12: And a star to guide you.

MOJ: And a star to guide you. Alright. So in the next one. Now what is-

S12: **Iridiologo?**

MOJ: Yes.

S12: It refers to the people who read the iris of the eye. That's the Spanish word. That's correct Spanish. That's the way you say it.

MOJ: Uh-huh. And a -

S12: **Naturista.**

MOJ: **Naturista** means?

S12: Well, basically he uses homeopathic medicine, you know: herbs, and extracts. No chemicals.

MOJ: So he's saying he reads the iris of the eye and then he treats homeopathically?

S12: Yeah, uh-huh.

MOJ: All right, now the next one...

S12: So if you suffer from-

MOJ: **"Pa-de-ce"** is suffering?

S12: Yeah, it's suffering, "padece."

MOJ: "Allergies"?

S12: "Allergies, arthritis, asthma"...

MOJ: Diabetes.

S12: Diabetes, bronchitis, headaches...

MOJ: Headaches?

S12: Yeah, **"dolor de cabeza."**

MOJ: Cabeza is headache?

S12: **De cabeza.** "Sterility."

MOJ: **Es-ter-il-i-dad.**

S12: Yeah, **esterilidad.**

MOJ: Is sterility.

S12: Hemorrhoids.

MOJ: Hemorrhoids.

S12: Liver.

MOJ: **Higado** is liver.

S12: Ulcers.

MOJ: Uh-huh. Colitis.

S12: Colitis, that's something having to do with colon problems. **Fatiga:** tiredness. High or low pressure.

MOJ: High or low pression?

S12: Pressure, pressure.

MOJ: Oh, pressure.

S12: Like high blood pressure, low blood pressure.

MOJ: Ok.

S12: Sexual impotence.

MOJ: "**Control de peso?**"

S12: Weight control.

MOJ: Weight control?

S12: Uh-huh. Heart problems.

MOJ: Now there, do they mean something physical or is this...?

S12: By the list, it's got to be physical.

MOJ: Uh-huh.

S12: Because this guy's selling himself as a doctor.

MOJ: And -

S12: Gall bladder stones, sinus, constipation, [???], from etc.

MOJ: How do you pronounce the word for constipation?

S12: **Es-treñ-imiento**. You use the tilde over the 'n,' the first 'n.' **Estreñimiento**.

MOJ: Over the 'n' is a tilde.

S12: Yeah.

MOJ: Okay. That was number twenty. Here goes the next one.

S12: Hierbas Genesis, [???] **sobador**.

MOJ: **Sobador**. What is Genesis?

S12: Genesis is like the book of Genesis.

MOJ: So herbs of Genesis?

S12: No. That's the name of the business – Genesis. You know, so that's what it is called because it's coming from the title from the first book of the Bible. See, it's like if you called your business, what?

MOJ: I don't know.

S12: If you own a restaurant and you call it "Exodus" and you quote it, you know what I mean?

MOJ: Oh, okay. They title the store Genesis.

S12: Genesis, as in the Bible. Which is a very nice way of saying that, you know, he's religious.

MOJ: Uh-huh.

S12: Okay. He's a religious person, i.e. Christian.

MOJ: But he's also saying that he offers herbs...

S12: Yeah, oh yeah, and he's a **Sobador** in general. So he treats all kind of problems. It might be not only muscle or bones or dual things, you know, that might require layman hands. Okay?

MOJ: Okay.

S12: So...

MOJ: And then...

S12: These products are from Mexico, Central America and they're 100% natural.

MOJ: Where is that?

S12: The first line, "**Productos de Mexico.**"

MOJ: Oh.

S12: Products from Mexico and Central America.

MOJ: Oh, ok. I don't have it.

S12: You have it?

MOJ: Just a minute. I had it in here. I had it...I didn't, for some reason didn't get that on this list. Okay, products from Mexico and Central America. It says natural. Now, what he treats, "**estreñimientos?**"

S12: "**Parasitos**", which are parasites, "diarrhea, and lice."

MOJ: Lice. "**Piojos**" is lice.

S12: "**Ladillas**" are...oh God I knew that name. It's an STD, it's a sexually transmitted thing. Scabies I think it is. Scabies. You know like the little thing that are just little insects just like lice that just get into a little area. Scabies I think it is called.

MOJ: Wait a minute. No.

S12: Oh, scabies. What is it.

MOJ: Well, there is pubic lice.

S12: Well, yeah that's probably what it is.

MOJ: It's in the genital area in the skin.

S12: Yeah. Then, there is "**chanco**" which is a word for syphilis. Boy, this is serious. This guy gets to very, very problematic areas.

MOJ: And gonorrhea.

S12: Gonorrhea, colic, ovaries, "**mal de orin.**"

MOJ: What does that mean?

S12: “**Mal de orin**” is usually an irritation of the bladder. “**Flujos.**”

MOJ: What is that?

S12: It’s like vaginal discharge. “**Tiña,**” which is, let me see. I knew the word for this one, **tiña**. It’s, you know, when the skin get like scaly skin and you scratch yourself, and it’s just a little scratch. You know, that type of thing. “**Empacho,**” which is stomach digestive problems, intoxications.

MOJ: Sinus infection.

S12: Male impotence and feminine frigidity.

MOJ: Female and frigidity. **Feminina?**

S12: “**Frigidez feminina.**” Female frigidity, which really anyone can get.

MOJ: And then what is “**tra-tar?**”

S12: “Also treats”

MOJ: Okay.

S12: “Fractures,” okay.

MOJ: “**Tor-ce-duras?**”

S12: “**Torceduras**” is when you twist or, you know, like you sprain a muscle or something like that. “**Golpes**” are lesions, but you know like, internal lesions. “Inflammation.”

MOJ: “**Desgarres?**”

S12: **Desgarres** is...what’s the English - broken ligaments and that’s what, broken ligaments. “**Calambres**” is...what’s the English word when your legs or your extremities fall asleep?

MOJ: Numbness?

S12: Numbness.

MOJ: **Uñas** -

S12: “**Enterradas.**” You know when the nails get, the nails get (sounds like:encrusted) nails.

MOJ: What is an encrusted nail?

S12: You know when the nail gets like, you know, like into the skin and you have to extract it.

MOJ: Oh, ingrown nail?

S12: Ingrown nail, yes that's what it is.

MOJ: Yeah I have that problem.

S12: Yeah.

MOJ: And then vitamins of -

S12: For blood, for the blood, for the bones, the skin, sight, brain. Then, earaches, "**dolor**" means ache so then, so these are the aches he treats: ear ache, throat ache, rheumatism, arthritis, hip and neck.

MOJ: Hip and neck. Okay.

S12: He is going to have to be very careful. He is putting himself into the [???], I mean he's dealing with things that are just reportable diseases, like syphilis and gonorrhea. Those are reportable diseases. You know what I mean?

MOJ: Yeah.

S12: They require drugs, prescribed drugs. He's got, you know he's putting himself really out there.

MOJ: And the bladder irritaion, vaginal discharge?

S12: Everything. That could be many things.

MOJ: Yeah.

S12: That could be many things, I mean, you know, he's getting into an area of STD's that are all reportable diseases.

MOJ: He's down there at the union swapmeet.

S12: Oh God.

MOJ: Señor Torres.

S12: Well, Señor Torres will find his butt one day in jail when one of those health officials gets a hold of this card and drops by, you know.

MOJ: Yeah, it's all on the card.

S12: Yeah, he can't say they were set.

MOJ: Nope. There's this list of questions, English translations. But all of these are vernacular.

S12: Yeah, there's...well, the only one I guess is 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8. Number eight, I think is been misspelled.

MOJ: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8. Okay.

S12: It says, mamay. So the last 'a' should be a letter 'e,' **mamey**.

MOJ: M-A-M-E with no 'y?'

S12: With the 'y.'

MOJ: With the 'y.'

S12: Yeah. [???] is a tree.

MOJ: That's a tree.

S12: It's a tropical tree.

MOJ: Uh-huh.

S12: But I don't know the English name for it.

MOJ: Okay.

S12: But at least with the right spelling you might be able to find it somewhere.

MOJ: Yeah.

S12: From the bottom, 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8, "**espantamuerto**." I have it.

MOJ: Oh.

S12: I have that plant here.

MOJ: Okay.

S12: But I don't know what the name is.

MOJ: Okay, well maybe we can take a look at it when it's in the form that Barry Craig might be able to identify it.

S12: Oh, I could give it to you right now. I think it's in bloom. I can give you the flower. You want me give you a sample now?

MOJ: Do you have it with you? Let me turn this off.

S12: So, “**espantamuerto**” [??] now.

MOJ: Now the next item is, let’s see, two pages from this website, the Apollo website: plants that are associated with these orishas and -

S12: All taken from El Monte.

MOJ: That’s what it said -

S12: Ah, here it is, ha, ha, ha!

MOJ: That is what I wanted to ask you, is this indeed [??]?

S12: Oh yes, as soon as I saw it. See, Lydia Cabrera and, you know, I’m so pissed I couldn’t get my postdoctoral translation finished. Lydia Cabrera did the most comprehensive collection of Cuban herbal knowledge, and of course, what she did was to keep up with the spirit of her book, El Monte, was to use the vernacular structure, which organizes the herbs by orisha, by Santo.

MOJ: Yeah.

S12: So as soon as I saw it, I said this is Lydia Cabrera because this is her structure. Everyone is imitating her because it is just very useful. Remember that, especially for diviners, when you do divination, you need to prescribe certain things. You have to go by Santo and by altar, and stuff like that.

MJ: Oh.

S12: She used a structure that is very - the structure that diviners use, and I have it down here. As soon as I saw it, I said come on, oh God, this is Cabrera, because she is the only one, the first one who did this. Then, the only thing that, what she did that was very good was that she would include the scientific name, whenever she found it, so you have vernacular, African whatever (you know the Congo or Yoruba), Spanish, and Latin. So even if you don’t know none of the weird names that you have in Cuba, with the Latin name you can go almost anywhere and you’ll find it.

MOJ: Yeah.

S12: So her structure is absolutely flawless. I mean she really thought about it. So it’s a whole chapter in El Monte that she titled “Tesoro Magico y Medicinal de (sounds like: Tatanfindo).” “**Tatanfindo**,” which is a Congo name. “Tatanfindo” is treasure of magical and herbal knowledge. It’s a whole chapter in, El Monte.

MOJ: Could you give me an example of how the Orisha, through divination, how it became known that that Orisha is the one that’s relevant to this case, and then how do you know which of these two dozen herbs is relevant?

S12: Well, you know, I was talking to Georges many years ago and we were laughing because I told, I said George I say can you imagine how many people poisoned themselves, got poisoned or bad cases of diarrhea - testing these herbs.

MOJ: Oh, yeah.

S12: Because none of these, many of these herbs are common to West Africa. They are tropical places anyway but many of them are indigenous to Cuba, so many herbs that were in Africa, associated with the Orishas, did not grow in Cuba, so many of them had to be substituted. Basically, it took experimenting. Testing them, trying them, probably on your enemies, buying them, and you know, I cannot even fathom the process of translating a whole body of knowledge, of herbal knowledge, and then filling out the gaps with whatever you have there. The only thing I can give you for example, is my own experience when I came to California from Puerto Rico, where the natural environment is just completely different. Being Puerto Rico is a tropical island, being that California is a semi-arid area. It makes things- I will read certain herbs that don't grow in California. They just don't grow, and then you have to substitute. But the only reason, the only way to substitute is by looking at what you got. I use to take long walks in Azusa, all over the place, and canvassing the area, trying to find out if some herb looked like the ones I knew and see their properties. Know what I mean? Sometimes, you know, some of them look quite like the ones I knew and then I found out that they were sub species or related species. I don't know how to tell, but they were related in some way, so I could translate that. Or I just don't even go there because, you know, when it comes to bath and stuff, well you can have a lucky guess. I mean there is a spiritist rule that you go by smell and by the sap of the plant. So, you know, in Spiritism, herbs are divided between sweet and strong, and it's a very self-explanatory division. If they smell sweet they're sweet. If they smell strong they're strong. For bath and all that, you know, you have to be very careful because of skin irritation and stuff like that. So I figure that if I went through a lot a hell and I still going through it after twenty years in California, you can imagine these people trying to figure out an island. I mean, it took hundreds of years to establish the properties of each one of these herbs, and then according to the properties, and according to what they healed, assigned it to a particular Santo. For example, if Oshun is the orisha that rules over the blood and over blood-related problems and over the people of this system, right? All those herbs that deal with those ailments were assigned to her. See what I mean? If **Babalú Aye** is the orisha that deals with infectious diseases, skin problems and stuff like that, all those herbs that would cause skin problems or heal them well, you know what I mean? It's a product of knowing your theology. It's about knowing your theology. But then the fact is how do you test an herb? You don't have to ingest it. So, I mean, for George and I, when we were translating El Monte, we just thought the idea, the same question how did they do that? Can you imagine how many people got poisoned or got bad cases of diarrhea? I mean there's a time that you have no choice but to boil the thing and drink it.

MOJ: Right.

S12: I mean there's no other way to see what it does. I mean it's just a matter of that you have to. That's it. You have to boil it, macerate it, drink it. I mean do something with it to see what it does. And, of course, they had help because the Spanish herbal knowledge came to Cuba too. The Chinese herbal knowledge, later on came to Cuba too. By then the

Chinese got to Cuba in the nineteenth century, the whole thing has been in place so they just added more, and now it's a matter of continuing to add, so I assume that in my case, through these years of tropical herbs, I'm adding the Californian ones and those who live in Oregon will add. The list kept being compounded wherever the religion went. So if you go to Mexico, all the Mexican, vernacular herbs have been established by the Mayan and native groups. They are common knowledge in Mexico. Knowing what they do it's very easy to go down this list and know what each orisha controls and then assign the herbs like that. But at the beginning, in Cuba, it had to be sheer hell. Just to translate that knowledge and substitute the ones you don't have. To give you an example, just a classic example. For divination among the Yoruba they use what they call **obicola**, which is the cola, the cola nut. That doesn't grow in the Caribbean. It doesn't. But it needs to be used for divination. The cola nut has the ability to have four loaves, two are male and two are female, and according to how they fall you can read them either as male/female, female/female, male/male or whatever. There are fifteen possible combinations. Well, there's no cola in Cuba so what they did was the closest thing to cola was the coconut. The problem with the coconut was that all the loaves; the four loaves are all female. So you lose ten possibilities right there. Then you're left with five. Good enough. You know what I mean. So coconut became the first line of divination so you don't understand that's too bad. But, you know, those were the worst you know. So that's why, that's how you have coconut used as a divination. In the Caribbean, in West African it's absolute unknown, you know. Even though they do have coconut. But it was useless for them. But they have cola. So things like that happen and then...

MOJ: Do they chop up the coconut meat into four?

S12: Into four pieces.

MOJ: Four pieces.

S12: But it's concave you know. Usually the cola have concave loaves and one that isn't. So they just go one into the other almost like male and female coupling. Right. So the properties are all female, so that's it. That's it. I mean, and then an idea with that in mind, you know, while you have the coconut, how do you justify it because you just can't go to the people and say yo we're gonna use this. So you have to create a **pataki**.

MOJ: A mythology for it.

S12: For it, and there's a wonderful story that was created in Cuba. That Obatala, the senior orisha, got all the orishas together and he said that in order for them to work and express their wishes they had to use this – the coconut, and he explained to the assembled pantheon how to use it. I wonder if that was not an actual meeting that took place among the elders.

MOJ: Yeah.

S12: Who just decided to...this is how we're going to do it, and then the human aspect was left outside and what it was left was the divine aspect that they were consecrated to. That **pataki** is a Creol **pataki**, it is a Cuban pataki to explain why we use coconut. So, you know, you have to create the whole system. Now no one can contest it. I mean, now I

can go to Washington and La Brea and get **obicola**, fresh. But it's useless for me. I can't use it because the community just doesn't like it, doesn't know how to use it, and doesn't have any kind of use for it.

MOJ: The Obatala, what does, what is associated with that orisha in terms of illnesses?

S12: Oh, diseases of the head, you know, like headaches and everything that have to do with the head. Dizziness.

MOJ: Okay.

S12: You know. Drunkenness, anything like that that makes your head really messed up. He also has to do with some issues of conception. So many of these herbs have to deal with many of that stuff.

MOJ: And what about Shango?

S12: **Shango** has to deal a lot with issues of the heart, the legs, and extremities. **Yemaya**, along with Oshun, **Yemaya** deals with problems of liquid retention, issues of water in the lungs, anything that have to do with water retention and liquid areas of the body. **Oshun** deals with problems of fertility. **Oya** has to deal a lot with mental problems, along with **Obatala** also. **Ellegua** with issues of orientation, you know, absent-mindedness. Remember he's a trickster, so anything that can really make you miss your mark, he's right there trying to...so he's a all around trouble maker.

MOJ: Wait a minute. I'm out of tape here.

Side B:

MOJ: Okay. Who's next on the list?

S12: **Ogun**, has to deal with fractures, broken bones. **Ochosi**, with issues of, how do you say, not mirage but hallucinations. **Babalú Aye** deals with infectious diseases, and skin diseases. **Enye** has to do with parasitic diseases-they really do not have a particular disease, they probably deal with, children's diseases because the babies are children, and **Osain**, he owns all the herbs. **Osain** is the master herbalist. Everything belongs to **Osain**, all the herbs. **Osain**, see if you want to think about **Osain**, you have to think about the Western concept of mother nature, except that in Lucumi and Yoruba culture, mother nature would be father nature. It would be the male aspect of nature because the female aspect of nature is **Ile**, the earth. So everything grows on the earth. That's the mother aspect and what grows on the earth is **Osain**. That's whay they say that Osain has no mother or father. He came out of the earth like the grass. That's what the old people say.

MOJ: **Omiero** is also I think from...

S12: **Omiero** is the herbal preparation. **Omiero** is how we prepare the mixture of herbs, the incantations, and the prayers. There is a whole ritual process of prep- it's a ritual herbal preparation. That's what it is, and it is done by consecrated people- by Santeros. I have a pair down there that you can see and check out. This weekend we have a

ceremony. So, that's what it is. Each one of the orishas has their own **omiero**, you know, with their particular herbs and stuff like that.

MOJ: Okay. Now, let's see. This first one- that Spanish term...

S12: **Ciruela.**

MOJ: **Ciruela.**

S12: Ciruela.

MOJ: That's what the omiero is called.

S12: No, that's what the plant is called.

MOJ: Oh, that's what the plant is called.

S12: Yeah.

MOJ: So golden hempo is the typical English term?

S12: Of plum, for plum.

MOJ: Oh.

S12: You know that's a plum tree.

MOJ: And so what? I mean, that plant is used in an omiero.

S12: Yes it's used in an omiero.

MOJ: From this list...

S12: Well this is just...

MOJ: ...doesn't tell me anything. What?

S12: Well, it's really a problem because see these are plants that don't have a particular, you know some of them have a particular virtue, but many of the plants that you have here have the virtue of the orisha and they are supposed to be used in conjunction with other plants. See, you don't make omiero with one plant. You can make, you know, that would be a bath. But you are going to make an omiero for consecration or for some ritual purposes, usually you have to put a number of them, no less than seven, together if you are going to do omiero because omiero is always used for consecration. See, omiero is not used that extensively for anything else, you know. It has very powerful medicinal properties by the fact that many of these herbs, when they are combined, they create some kind of compound, you know what I mean. For example, many people...one of the things that omiero does, is that when you pour it over something, say if you pour it over cement. You know how cement gets old and dark. If you pour omiero over cement, it will

bleach it. That's how strong it is. It will bleach it. So you can imagine seven days of drinking that. So any kind of priest, for seven days that's your breakfast. A big oh glass of that. Now you have to imagine that for every consecration, you have seven different pairs of omiero prepared and at the end of the consecration they are all poured together in one container. So you can imagine what you have. It's a dynamo of energy, so when you drink that, I mean, when you come out of there your skin is absolutely beautiful.

Everything. I mean, you've been cleansed inside out because each one of these plants, you know they're chosen very carefully, so when you mix them up together it creates like a mega medicine, so to speak. I tell people, if you take omiero and pour it over cement, it bleaches it. Can you imagine when you drink it? It just takes the whole thing, the whole system. It just gets rid of it. Your skin, everything just comes out, all those impurities of years, you know, just gets out. I mean your system gets really an overhaul and many of these herbs have very powerful effects on their own. But the way they are combined in omiero they neutralize each other just so. See what I mean? For example, angel trumpet, that has very potent hallucinogenic properties, when it's put in the omiero it doesn't make you trip because it's not used on its own, it's used with others that temper its properties. See what I mean? So it's not that you use it, and then you put it there on its own. It will create certain problems. But, you know, the combination of herbs, and that's why it's so important to have an osianista do this because its important to gather the herbs and balance them up. You know what I mean? Then the omiero will just come absolutely perfect. The omiero is made in such a way that if you put it in a bottle, and you lock it it will ferment like beer. It will foam up the whole thing in a couple of days. It will ferment immediately with nothing else but just omiero, and when you smell it, it just smells like beer, and when you open it it just foams up. It's just the most amazing thing. But let me take you so we can see what it looks like because...

MOJ: Can I take the camera along?

S12: Oh, sure.

MOJ: All right?

S12: Because, you know, unless you see it you won't see what I mean.

MOJ: Yeah, and that's why I like working on film.

S12: Oh, you have to see my omiero when it's dry too, when it's prepared. See they have the leaves inside, some of them. See? This is, once you prepare it, the crust leaves. See?

MOJ: Uhuh.

S12: So once you take the leaves out and the whole thing, that has other ingredients that are added to it but basically that's what omiero is. So if you look at it the way it is, it is a very, you know, it's just pure chlorophyll. Smell. See?

MOJ: Very potent.

S12: Huh?

MOJ: Pretty potent smell.

S12: Pretty potent. This one, so you know, you get the herbs out.

MOJ: Yeah.

S12: Then what you are left with is just pure chlorophyll. So what you have is a concoction that acts with each other. So after a couple of days it start getting like that. See what I mean?

MOJ: Yes.

S12: However, this may be left in the open but if you...now smell.

MOJ: Yes, that's a real different smell.

S12: Oh, yes. That means that it's been there for almost two weeks. Okay.

MOJ: I might bathe in it but I don't know about drinking it.

S12: Oh, well let me tell you brother. See what I was talking to you about omiero bleaching things, see look at this. This is the regular cement. This is what happened. It bleaches the whole thing, and I made the mistake of putting Osain in a bowl of omiero. See what happened? It bleached the whole- this is the whole -

MOJ: Changed the color.

S12: ...the whole patina of years, and I put it like this up to here with omiero and they just ate away, so you can imagine when it gets to you it really does a number.

MOJ: Yeah.

S12: So, you know, for some people it's just big time almost needing the restroom because it just really serve as the...it purges them. It's just really powerful. So that's what omiero does.

MOJ: Okay.

S12: And, you know, this is an issue. You know, an Osainista knows what herbs to put together.

(BREAK)

S12: Omiero is a water that cools, that softens.

MOJ: And how long does it take to prepare?

S12: Oh God, almost two hours between, you know, the whole thing, until you're done because it's made with prayers and incantations sung with, you know, call and response type of songs and it's a labor intensive type of event.

MOJ: Can you tell me why this omiero was made, what it was used for?

S12: Oh, that's for consecration, for a Santo that they initiated so, you know, you have to prepare the ritual bath. So it's not, see that's why I told you that you don't do omiero just because. There has to be a reason, and there's usually a ritual reason for it. Yes, you can make it for medicinal purposes and that's a possibility. I've done it and many people done it. But, you know, most of the time omiero proper is done like that, and many people will store it in a refrigerator and keep it. So whenever they need some it's kept fresh in the fridge because it last for a long time. There's no way you can spoil that. If you keep it in the fridge, it will last forever, and if you keep it covered, as soon as you open it after a couple of weeks it will have fermented and you have almost a beer.

MOJ: Now, the one that's in the pan for two weeks, what is it going to be used for now?

S12: Oh, I can use it for a bath. I can use it for all kind of ritual uses and the whole thing. But, you know, I have enough omiero stored out and, in my case, having all my plants here, if I need to get something done, I just go around, pick my plants for the omiero and that's the end of it. See we have two- there are three priests in this house so we can make it in no time.

MOJ: Yeah.

S12: You know, because you need a Santero or Santera to prepare the omiero. A layperson cannot make it.

MOJ: And under ingredients, an omiero...there are different omieros and different ingredients.

S12: And they're seasoned differently, yes. And they're seasoned differently.

MOJ: But what determines the making of this omiero versus the making of that omiero?

S12: What deity you're working with.

MOJ: And the deity...

S12: So the omiero for Obatala is seasoned, prepared and seasoned differently than the omiero for Yemaya and the omiero for Ile is prepared and seasoned differently, and then the omiero for Ellegua. Even though they all take herbs, there are certain other ingredients that go into the omiero that have some affinity with the deity. Just to give you an example, Obatala cannot have palm oil because he abhors palm oil, so his omiero cannot have palm oil. See, just to give you an example. So everything goes by the likes and personality of the orisha, you know, cause it's like what you're doing is translating the energy of the orisha into herbal terms. See you've translated, you've basically downloaded the orisha into the herbs, so you're creating the orisha in a liquid form. So

when you ingest it, you're not just ingesting herbs, you're ingesting the spirit of the orisha with it. That's what you're doing. It's a translation. It's a complete translation.

MOJ: Of that orisha?

S12: Of that orisha. I mean -

MOJ: Who determines the orisha that's relevant?

S12: Divination. Divination.

MOJ: Divination.

S12: Divination.

MOJ: In this case, you said it was some people were being initiated. Then how did you know that orisha?

S12: Divination. Everything in the Lucumi tradition hinges on the centrality of divination.

MOJ: Right.

S12: So there's no way that you can, I can look at you and say well you look like a child of whatever.

MOJ: Okay.

S12: And many people will say that you look like a child of Obatala because you have white hair and Obatala and the whole thing. But, you know, I could be wrong. The only way to be certain is to establish a divination session and let the oracle speak and address the issue and tell you beyond any doubt what it is, and then after that then you do. That's why divination is central to all this. Without divination the system just doesn't work. Because without divination what you have is human likes and dislikes, and you can, you know, I might decide that because Obatala, you know, has white hair and stuff like that and the whole thing, and I say I'll give you a shot of Obatala because you have white hair. Well, I have white hair and I'm a child of Oshun. Know what I mean? So in that sense my opinion is completely irrelevant. I might have a lucky hunch and just be right, but that is only confirmed after the oracle has spoken. So the consultation is central to Lucumi tradition. Without divination the system just doesn't work. It doesn't operate.

MOJ: Would you explain to me different kinds of initiation because the only one I'm familiar with is the one that you went through, but that's not what you prepared this omiero for.

S12: Oh, no, no. You have initiation for to receive the beads. You have initiations to receive the warriors. You have initiation to receive a particular orisha to be initiated into a particular cult of a particular orisha. You have initiation to become a Santero or a Santera, and throughout, see Lucumi tradition is a matter of initiation. You just don't get

into things, you know. You just have to be initiated. You have to have the authority because it's an issue of authority. If you have the authority you're not supposed to be in certain places or you don't have the...if you're not initiated at the level of the beads then there's certain ceremonies that basically say you just can't be there. But just having the beads doesn't authorize you to be into everything. In order to be inside of the room where the omiero is prepared and everything is prepared you have to be a Santero because the room is the realm of the priests and the priestesses. So for you to cross that door, you have to be a Santero. That's what it is. So if you don't have an orisha you cannot participate in the right of that orisha.

MOJ: Right.

S12: And to be able to participate in the right of the orisha you have to be initiated into the mysteries of that orisha, and that's what determines. You know I can be a Santero, but for example, I'm a Santero and I'm not, I don't have let's say what? I don't have **Odu**, which is an orisha. Because I don't have it, whenever there's a ceremony for Odu I cannot be present.

MOJ: Oh.

S12: Because I don't have the authority to be there. So, you know, if you don't have the authority to participate in those mysteries, you don't have the right to be there, so you're just outside and you can be a Santero and you can be an elder. But if you are not initiated into that particular cult within the religious tradition, you don't have any right to be there. It doesn't matter how knowledgeable, how ancient you are. It just doesn't matter.

MOJ: So the various levels or stages beginning at the lowest authority and working up, would you name them for me.

S12: Oh, basically people begin with receiving the beads, then they will receive the warriors, then the men receive **Olucun** or any other orisha. Then they may become initiated as a priest, you know, at priest level, the priestly level. Then they might receive the ceremony for the elderhood, the **cuchillo**. You know that gives them the right to sacrifice. They can then become Babalaos, and once you get to the priesthood it's a matter of acquiring other orishas, and each orisha comes to you through initiation. So you can be a Santero and have only the seven basic orishas and not have anything else, and you stay right there. You can stay there if you so choose or you might decide that you might want to receive other orishas and then you go on and get initiated and then you keep acquiring-what they call the celestial court, you know, which is all the orishas.

MOJ: Now is the, that seven day initiation, is that only for becoming a priest?

S12: Yes.

MOJ: So after that, in initiation you don't have to go through that...

S12: Seven day seclusion, no.

MOJ: ...deep, difficult...

S12: No, the seven day seclusion is basically for becoming a priest.

MOJ: And the initiation to have an orisha, is that the one that where a person wears white for a year?

S12: No, that's to become a priest.

MOJ: That's to become a priest.

S12: Yeah.

MOJ: To wear white for a year.

S12: For a year.

MOJ: And the seven days precedes or follows that?

S12: Precedes.

MOJ: Precedes.

S12: You get consecrated first, then your seven days, after those seven days, for a whole year you wear white.

MOJ: Wow.

S12: That's your initiate. Okay.

MOJ: Now some people have a religious ceremony after the year or the day...

S12: Yeah.

MOJ: ...is over.

S12: After three months, then there's another ceremony. After two months after that, you become a priest, and then after, when your year is up then that's when you have the famous birthday celebration that marks your integration into society. You are out of the white and you become just, not a normal citizen, but you don't have to wear white all the time. You just reintegrate into society as a full-fledged priest or priestess.

MOJ: And then every year you're supposed to celebrate the saint/santos day?

S12: Yeah, well, you are supposed to celebrate the day of your initiation of the day that you were consecrated as a Santero, and that's the famous birthday party that people talk about.

MOJ: So that day is the day that you were initiated.

S12: Exactly.

MOJ: At the beginning of the seven day consecration?

S12: Yeah, exactly, the very first day.

MOJ: Is there a time during the year when a Santero also celebrates the birthday of the orisha?

S12: Oh yeah, some people do. Some people will celebrate the calendar day of that orisha like the people, the children of Shango might celebrate December the 4th or the children of Yemaya might celebrate September the 7th or the children of Oshun may celebrate September the 6th. Seis, siete. September the 7th for Oshun and the 8th for Yemaya. The people of Obatala might celebrate August...I forgot the date. That coordinates with the Catholic calendar. People do that. I don't, that is why I don't remember the dates. But people may celebrate both. They celebrate. But of both of them, the most important is the day that you became a Santero. So, for me, July 14th was the day I was consecrated as a Santero. That's the day that I create the throne, the altar and the whole thing, and have people come and gather to celebrate that anniversary. Then you count your years by that day, so you count your years every time your anniversary comes along. That's when a Santero says I'm (x) amount of years old. He might be talking about as a Santero or Santera. So if people ask me, you know, how old are you in the religion? I will say, well I'm twenty-one. I'm twenty-two years old in the religion, meaning as a priest.

MOJ: As a priest.

S12: So obviously if I say I'm twenty-two years old, people are going to look at me and will not know what I'm talking about if they're not members of the religion. They will say, you don't look twenty-two and you go well, yes, I'm twenty-two as a priest, as my years of experience as a priest, as opposed to the year of my birth. So that's...

MOJ: The omiero that's prepared for different initiations, is an omiero always a privileged or the constituencies- what it's made of, is it always privileged information, secret information?

SF: Yeah, it usually is. But they're all natural ingredients, you know. Like, for example, palm oil like I told you for example. But it's just that each omiero takes a complete different...it's a recipe. It's like a recipe. If you're going to make a particular dish, you need certain ingredients and you have to put it also. When you're going to season, it's called seasoning the pot. When you're going to season the bowl where the omiero is, where the liquid is, then according to each Santo, all the ingredients will go in there. That is where the problem is because the Oriate must be knowledgeable because you don't have a margin of error allowed to you. It's that these things go there but they don't go here, and if you don't know you can end up making a big mess and rendering all that work useless.

MOJ: But as you say, what is in Cabrera's book might have been true in Cuba, in 1940 but is not true in Los Angeles, in 2002.

S12: The experience that I have proves the contrary. That it still is. That the ingredients that were seasoned, that the omiero were seasoned in Cuba, are still the ingredients that are seasoned with, in Los Angeles in 2002. The herbs might have changed a little bit, due to fact that we talked about. But some people, me included, when we are going to have a big ceremony - I usually send out for my herbs from Miami.

MOJ: Oh.

S12: So you have them shipped and then you have the canonical herbs. Some people choose not to do that. It's more expensive. I mean you have to pay overnight and it's a disaster. But if I want to, if I'm going to have a consecration of a priest or a priestess, I rather have the herb that I know, and since Miami has the very same things that you'll find in the Caribbean, and you have people there you call, there's a botanica there that you call and say, you know, I'm making, I'm consecrating a person into...I'm making Yemaya. Send me the herbs. They will go out and pick out the herbs exactly for Yemaya. So what you get is a canonical set of herbs.

MOJ: So Cabrera's compilation then is really...

S12: Is valid today as it was -

MOJ: Yeah, valid is important in indicating what the herbs are that -

S12: Yes.

MOJ: Just, since you say that it cleans out the system and makes you look healthy and we see what it did to the concrete, why it's important to know what all those herbs are that go together.

S12: Absolutely.

MOJ: Her list is...

S12: Is valid. It's a very important list and it's very important because what she did was, and I always admire her for that because she was ahead about what we've been talking in the Folklore program all along, what she did was, and she says it in her introduction. That she let them, she let her informants speak. She just transcribed and whatever things were like kind of foggy, she would make questions or add, you know, clarification, but still leaving the impromptu information there, and that's why the book is so difficult to deal with. The book is invaluable for all those purposes but if you go to read, El Monte, speaking Spanish, is not the only thing that you need. You need to speak Lucumi, you need to know Congo, you need to know vernacular Spanish, you need to know not only vernacular Spanish but, all vernacular Spanish. You know what I mean? So many people will go to El Monte, who are fluent in Spanish, and just go away in despair because for every ten pages they read they miss eight. So they just throw their arms up in despair like, I can't read this book. So what you have is, a book that is not really a book. It's...what she published was her field notes. That's what the problem is. You know when you go to the field and you just make scribbled notes really quick. Well what she did is she just took all those notes and published them. So there's no explanation. That is why when I

was talking to Indiana about publishing, El Monte, and they still want it, they said we're going to have to do two volumes. One volume text, just straight out text, and one volume just notes because one book is going to be impossible. Georges and I found ourselves really, really frustrated because we have like, in one page two lines, and the rest is of the page is of footnotes. Well, we have footnotes there, like it's about five pages long. Just footnotes. So can you imagine a book with that. It's going to be just a cumbersome volume, but you have to do it because what I found out was that when I was trying to explain the title *El Monte*, which is an article and a noun, El Monte, it took me twenty-five pages to go through it. But including the footnotes.

MOJ: In one sentence, what does **El Monte** mean?

S12: The bush.

MOJ: The bush.

S12: The bush. That's what it is. But if you go to the dictionary it will be mountain. But in vernacular Spanish, "El Monte" is any overgrown piece of land. But the nuance that that brings. See people will say that I have "El Monte" back there; just full of plants. See. But the nuance that that implies is full of mythological, theological implications that you have to spell out, and that has a very long tradition not only in African tradition but also in Spanish tradition because in Spanish vernacular, the name is used to mean the same. You know, in Spanish when you say "**cojio el monte**," it means that you just got lost. I mean that, you know, someone was looking for you and you just disappeared. Right? All the nuances of the language, she used a brilliant choice of words for a title because as soon as you see the book you know what she's talking about. You know that you're up to supernatural. You're up to mysterious. You're up to medicinal. You're up to hocus-pocus stuff. The name was brilliant! The title of the book was just absolutely brilliant. But explaining all that is just ridiculous. It's the shortest title in Caribbean literature, and the longest, and the hardest one to explain. It's amazing. So, you know, it takes time. To plan to finish up translating that, it's going to take me easily...I was talking to Georges and, you know, we agreed it's going to take a whole year, with doing nothing but, because by the time that you get it back and forth, you know, translated, you know correcting and stuff like that, It's going to take a year, easy.

MOJ: Okay. Well, I've been here a couple of hours, and really we've done a whole lot during that time so lets -

S12: Okay.

MOJ: Let me -

END OF TAPE